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LITERARY PROBLEMS IN MORE'S *RICHARD III*

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Michigan.

PART II

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II

LITERARY PROBLEMS IN MORE'S *RICHARD III*

SIR Thomas More's *History of Richard III* has been adequately studied as an historical document,¹ but not as a work of literature; and yet since the time of Ascham it has been praised chiefly and properly for its literary qualities.² It is the purpose of this article, therefore, to discuss some of the important literary problems presented by *Richard III*. An attempt will be made to show how closely More's narrative conforms to classical theory and to what extent it is imitative of classical histories. Of chief concern, however, will be More's use of irony. It will be evident throughout that his approach to history writing was that of a Christian humanist.

By 1513, the probable date of composition of *Richard III*,³ More's formal education had been completed and he had served his literary apprenticeship. He had been educated in Morton's household, at Oxford and the Inns of Court; he had lectured on the philosophical and historical ideas of St. Augustine's *De civitate dei*,⁴ he had composed a few poems and an English version of a life of Pico della Mirandola,⁵ and with Erasmus

¹ By A. F. Pollard, "The Making of Sir Thomas More's *Richard III*," *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tate* (Manchester, 1933), pp. 223-238.

² Ascham, *Works*, ed. J. A. Giles (London, 1864), III, 5-6: a letter to John Astley, 1552. Ascham predicates that a history should be a true, orderly account of events and their causes, that the historian should comment upon the merits of motives, counsels, and actions, should note general lessons "of wisdom and wariness," and should stress "the inward disposition of the mind" as did Thucydides, Homer, and especially Chaucer. More's *Richard III*, concludes Ascham, "doth in most part, I believe, of all these points so content all men, as, if the rest of our story of England were so done, we might well compare with France, or Italy, or Germany, in that behalf." One notices the presence of Homer and Chaucer among historians, and wonders also whether Ascham was thinking of the similarity between More's and Chaucer's use of irony in character portrayal.

Even Pollard (*op. cit.*, pp. 230-231) admits that since More's purpose was to write dramatically, criticism of his factual errors is sometimes irrelevant. Yet he comments sarcastically, for instance, upon the improbability of More's dramatic version of Edward's dying speech.

³ This is the date given by Rastell for the Latin version. Internal evidence indicates that neither the Latin nor the English version could have been begun before 1509, and that they may have been worked on as late as 1517. Cf. R. W. Chambers, "The Authorship of the 'History of Richard III'," More's *English Works* (London, 1931), I, 34 and 37.

⁴ In 1501. Stapleton states that "he did not treat this great work from the theological point of view, but from the standpoint of history and philosophy; and indeed the earlier books . . . deal with these two subjects almost exclusively. . . ." *The Life and Illustrious Martyrdom of Sir Thomas More*, tr. P. E. Hallett (London, 1928), p. 9.

Augustine's greatly influential statement of the providential theory of history is interesting in connection with More's treatment of the *de casibus* example.

⁵ In 1505? More's purpose, according to Stapleton (*op. cit.*, pp. 9-10), was chiefly self-

he had translated some of Lucian's dialogues.⁶ In More's home Erasmus, among other things, had finished translating two plays of Euripides, and on his return from Italy in 1509 had composed the *Encomium Moriae*. An unusual background for an historian. More had not been trained, as he would be today, in the handling of historical documents and had not been impressed with their fundamental importance. Although his education had included wide reading in the classical and Christian historians,⁷ it was primarily theological, legal, and literary rather than scholarly, and his theory of history writing must have been influenced chiefly by the ancient rhetoricians, all of whom discussed history in connection with epideictic oratory.⁸

Lucian's dialogue, *Quomodo historia conscribenda sit*, is a typically conservative classical treatment of its subject, and it was no doubt fresh in More's mind when he began *Richard III*.⁹ It is significant that even Lucian, who so bitterly attacked sophistic excesses, could think of history only as a branch of oratory. The historian, Lucian argues, is superior to the research worker because he composes artistically the material that the latter has merely collected. The historian is like a sculptor: his material is at hand, and his business is to superinduce upon events the

guidance. He had just decided against becoming a priest, and Pico appealed to him as a man who successfully combined "encyclopedic knowledge and . . . sanctity." The pre-occupation with the task of harmonizing the Christian and classical attitudes is evident in *Richard III*.

⁶ In 1505-06. More contributed translations of *Cynicus*, *Menippus* or *Necromantia*, *Philopseudes*, and *Tyrannicida*, with an original declamation in answer. Between 1503 and 1517 Erasmus translated thirty-six of Lucian's writings. Cf. Craig Thompson, *The Translations of Lucien by Erasmus and St. Thomas More* (Ithaca, New York, 1940).

⁷ For history in the schools, see especially Foster Watson, *Vives: On Education* (Cambridge, 1913); W. H. Woodward, *Erasmus Concerning the Aim and Method of Education* (Cambridge, 1904), and *Vittorino da Feltre and other Humanist Educators* (Cambridge, 1905); and J. A. Gee, *The Life and Works of Thomas Lupset* (Yale Univ. Press, 1928), pp. 88-89.

⁸ Cf. T. C. Burgess, "Epideictic Literature," *Univ. of Chicago Studies in Classical Philology*, III (1902), 195-213. For the continuation of the tradition among the early Italian humanists, many of whose writings were known in England in More's time, see Remigio Sabbadini, *Il metodo degli umanisti* (Firenze, 1922), Cap. VIII: "Storiografia." The tradition was carried to England in person by Polydore Vergil, who began his *Anglica historia* shortly after 1501 and published it in 1534. A satisfactory comparison of Polydore's theory and method of history-writing with More's must await the appearance of a critical edition of the *Historia*, which has been promised. The important Vatican MS. is a first draft in Polydore's own hand, which was written in 1512-13 and ends in 1513. Cf. Denis Hay, "The Manuscript of Polydore Vergil's 'Anglica Historia,'" *EHR*, LIV (1939), 240-252.

⁹ Although not translated by More or Erasmus, it was in the edition of Lucian which they used. The story of Diogenes at the opening of *Utopia* may be from it. It was translated into Latin by Pirckheimer (Nuremberg, 1515), to whom More had dedicated his *Epigrammata*.

charm of order, proportion, and lucidity.¹⁰ He interprets what is known, and he is able to do this by virtue of his faculty of expression and his political insight that has been gained from practical experience.¹¹ It is generally agreed that More worked in this fashion. He was an interpreter and a composer, not a compiler.¹²

At the same time, Lucian warns the historian that he should employ artistic or epideictic devices intelligently; they should be functional rather than decorative. Most commonly abused is *ἐκφρασις*, or description. God save us, says Lucian, from long descriptions of persons, arms, towns, mountains, plains, and rivers. It is ignorance of what is really essential that leads to description of things that are insignificant or fantastically theatrical. "You observe," he concludes, "how indispensable it all is to the history; without the scene, how could we have comprehended the action."¹³ The ironical implication is clear: this legitimate reason for description is too often an excuse for over-indulgence. Speeches, likewise, should not be merely opportunities for display; they may be eloquent but at the same time they must suit the occasion and the character of the speaker.¹⁴ The greatest danger, however, is the tendency to eulogize excessively. Although the historian may praise moderately, he must not misrepresent the facts. That would destroy the value of his narrative, for "should history ever repeat itself, the records of the past may give present guidance."¹⁵ Praise and blame should be conveyed subtly, Lucian implies, and as far as possible by the actions themselves. Apparently the historian should emphasize the fifth topic of the conventional encomium, *ἐπιτηδεύματα*, or deeds which imply choice and therefore reveal char-

¹⁰ *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, tr. H. W. and F. G. Fowler (Oxford, 1905), II, 118, 131-133. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

¹² The traditional distinction between the historian and the compiler was well established. Bacon observed, a century after More, that a great inconvenience in historical composition in his time was the lack of adequate chronicles or catalogues of brute facts upon which the historian could exercise his powers of interpretation and synthesis.—Preface to *Henry VII*, *Works*, ed. Spedding, Ellis, and Heath (Boston, 1860-64), XI, 35.

This distinction is also important in the controversy over the authorship of *Richard III*. There has never been any reasonable doubt that the extant versions are More's, but it has been suggested that his source was written and fairly elaborate, and that, in short, he may have done little more than reproduce a composition by Morton or someone else. Cf. W. G. Zeeveld, "A Tudor Defense of Richard III," *PMLA*, LV (1940), 946-957. This cannot be settled without further external evidence, but certainly it was considered proper in More's time for an historian to use a previous chronicle as the basis for his literary and interpretative treatment. It should be clear from the present discussion that a great merit of *Richard III* is its literary excellence, and that probably More alone was responsible for that excellence.

¹³ *Works*, tr. Fowler, pp. 119-120, 123. Cf. T. C. Burgess, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-201.

¹⁴ Tr. Fowler, p. 134. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-116, 120, 121, 124, 125, 129-130.

acter.¹⁶ Every reader of *Richard III* knows that descriptions and speeches are generously employed by More, but always for a functional rather than a decorative purpose, and that he excels at subtly controlling our attitude towards his characters. These matters will be returned to in connection with More's use of irony. Another problem raised by Lucian, however, does need discussion at this point.

When one admits, as does Lucian, that the "historian's spirit should not be without a touch of the poetical,"¹⁷ and that epideictic devices when properly used are legitimate in history-writing, the way is opened to an obvious abuse. Why not heighten the effectiveness of one's narrative by closely imitating the successful descriptions, speeches, and critical comments of earlier and greater historians? That this was the common practice in Lucian's time is indicated by his severe criticism of it. Imitations of Pericles' funeral oration draw from him, he says, tears of laughter.¹⁸ The charge of plagiarism is the one that is oftenest lodged against early humanist historians. When Feuter, for example, labels an historian "rhetorical," this is a criticism he generally implies. More himself has been so labeled.¹⁹ What is the evidence against him?

According to Stapleton, More "studied with avidity all the historical works he could find."²⁰ Judging from such evidence as references in the writings of More's friends, library catalogues, bibliographical surveys, and school curriculums, the classical historians most popular around 1513 were these, and in about this order: Livy, Sallust, Valerius Maximus, Plutarch, Xenophon, Justin, Curtius, Caesar, Florus, Arrian, Thucydides, Herodotus, Josephus, Suetonius, and Polybius.²¹ More was doubtless

¹⁶ Cf. T. C. Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

¹⁷ Tr. Fowler, p. 130.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁹ Eduard Feuter, *Histoire de l'historiographie moderne*, tr. Émile Jeanmaire (Paris, 1914), pp. 20, 21, 27, 198-199. Cf. Emilio Santini, "Leonardo Bruni Aretini e i suoi 'Historiarum Florentini populi libri xii'," *Annali della R. Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, xxii (1910), 47-48, 114-116.

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 15. He tells us also (p. 104) that Sallust was used as a textbook in More's household.

²¹ The historical reading of a mature scholar would differ, of course, from that prescribed for a schoolboy, and there is some evidence that Tacitus, and especially Thucydides, would be ranked higher by More's humanist contemporaries than this list indicates. This is important in connection with More's use of irony; consequently their histories as well as those listed above have been compared with *Richard III*. There is, for example, the item "Cornelius Tacitus" in the catalogue of Grocyn's library made in 1520 by William Linacre (*Collectanea*, Oxf. Hist. Soc., sec. ser., pt. v, 1890). This was probably the Tacitus purchased in 1521 for Corpus Christi. See J. R. Liddell, "The Library of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, in the Sixteenth Century," *The Library*, n. s., xviii (1938), 385-416. Dorne, in 1520, records (no. 1811) "Cornelius Tacitus nouus magnus in quaternis." See "Day-Book of John Dorne," ed. F. Madden, *Collectanea*, Oxf. Hist. Soc., first ser., 1885. Corpus Christi had two copies of Thucydides by 1538 (Liddell, *op. cit.*); one copy is listed in Linacre's will (1534) according to J. N. Johnson, *The Life of Thomas Linacre* (London, 1835), p. 344;

well acquainted with all of them. Nevertheless, a careful comparison of the sections of these histories which are at all similar in subject-matter to *Richard III* with both the English and Latin versions of More's narrative reveals no examples of what we would call plagiarism.²² As might have been expected, a writer of More's intelligence and talent would not imitate slavishly. Instead of borrowing passages or aping mannerisms, he imitated in a truer fashion by adapting classical literary methods to his own ends.

The ironical method is the one which chiefly distinguishes *Richard III*.

and John Clement, More's protégé, owned three copies before 1549 as shown in A. W. Reed, "John Clement and his Books," *The Library*, vi (1925-26), 329-339. Thucydides was one of the Aldine Greek historians prized by the Utopians (Bk. II, chap. vi.).

²² Two passages in Sallust have the closest parallels in *Richard III*. The first, somewhat of a stereotype, is a characterization of Jugurtha at the climax of his bloody career, after he has murdered Bomilcar and other former confederates.

But from that time forward Jugurtha never passed a quiet day or night; he put little trust in any place, person, or time; feared his country men and the enemy alike; was always on the watch, started at every sound; and spent his nights in different places, many of which were ill suited to the dignity of a king. Sometimes on being roused from sleep he would utter outcries and seize his arms; he was hounded by a fear that was all but madness. [Tr. J. C. Rolfe (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1921), pp. 287-289.]

Richard suffers in a similar fashion after he has climaxed his crimes with the murder of the young princes.

... after this abominable deed done, he never had quiet in his mind, he never thought himself sure: where he went abroad, his eyes whirled about, his body privily fenced, his hand ever on his dagger, his countenance and manner like one always ready to strike again; he took ill rest o' nights, lay long waking and musing, sore wearied with care and watch, rather slumbered than slept, troubled with fearful dreams, suddenly sometime started up, leaped out of his bed and ran about the chamber, so was his restless heart continually tossed and tumbled with the tedious impression and stormy remembrance of his abominable deed. See *English Works*, I, 451-452. Cited hereafter as *EW*. It is impossible to compare the Latin since both Latin versions of *Richard III* (Louvain 1565 and MS. Arundel 43) break off before this.

More states that he has this information about Richard's condition "by credible report, of such as were secret with his chamberers"; but it is possible that his treatment was influenced by Sallust, whom, he must, indeed, have had by heart.

The second parallel is that between the dying speeches of Edward and Micipsa. (*EW*, 403-405; Sallust, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-151. There are no verbal similarities between the Latin versions.) The passages which are too long for quotation, contain these similarities. In both instances a dying king is leaving the royal power to minors and therefore pleads with the nobles to preserve harmony and lawful order by being loyal to kin and country. And in both instances the nobles reply ironically, pretending to accede when they are really plotting to rebel. Edward's speech is, as Pollard observes, a "more finished composition than [he] could achieve *in articulo mortis*" (*Op. cit.*, p. 234). Judged as an epideictic device, however, it conforms to Lucian's precepts, because it is suitable to the speaker and the occasion, because it heightens the emotional effect, and because, as we shall see, it performs an integral function in the structure of the history as a whole.

It was a method congenial to More's temperament,²³ but his natural bent may well have been strengthened and directed by classical theory, by his study of the practice of Tacitus and Thucydides, and particularly by his intimate knowledge of Lucian and the *Encomium Moriae*. There is some evidence that classical rhetoricians recommended the use of irony in vituperative portraits, of which *Richard III* is in part an example.²⁴ The most pertinent remarks are in the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, a standard textbook in More's day. "In finding fault you must employ irony. . . ." Do not simply scoff at the object of your attack, but describe his life; for the evidence is always more convincing and damaging than any comment.²⁵ This is More's practice; his characters condemn themselves, and we seem to form our own judgment of them. The irony in this method springs, of course, from the disparity between the characters' apparent opinion of themselves and our opinion of them. They are described as behaving in a way that can bring them only into disrepute.

Other classical discussions of irony center around verbal and Socratic irony and the ironical character. Aristotle distinguishes the ironical man from the boastful man; they are both extremes from the mean of matter-of-factness. The ironical man is characterized by excessive self-deprecation. Although this is preferable to excessive boastfulness, it is still generally a vice.²⁶ Theophrastus, in his character of the ironical man,²⁷ followed Aristotle, but further narrowed and degraded the conception so that it resembles somewhat the *ieron* of ancient Greek comedy.²⁸ The ironical man is one who obtains an abnormal pleasure from misleading or inconveniencing others by disguising his real feelings and intentions. *Richard III* is often ironical in this sense. The controlling principle in his life is dissimulation.²⁹ His foil is not the stupid, over-

²³ Cf. R. W. Chambers, *Thomas More*, pp. 18-19, and Stapleton, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-139.

²⁴ Cf. T. C. Burgess, *op. cit.*, p. 110. Evidence is scanty because classical rhetoricians generally contented themselves with saying that the principles of the vituperative portrait were simply the counterpart of those of the encomium.

²⁵ *Works of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford, 1924), xi, 1441b.

Ironical invective was of course employed by Christian writers and preachers, including More's favorite Father, St. Augustine. Cf. Sister M. Inviolata Barry, *St. Augustine, the Orator* (Washington, D. C., 1924), p. 126: "This figure [irony] is admirably adapted for reproving sin and error, consequently Augustine makes a liberal use of it."

²⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics* iv.7; see also ii.7, iv.3, and *Eudemian Ethics* iii.7.

²⁷ *Characters*, ed. with translation and notes by R. C. Jebb, rev. by J. E. Sandys (London, 1909), 51-53; see especially note 1, p. 51.

This character was in the *editio princeps* published with a Latin translation by More's friend Pirckheimer at Nuremberg in 1527 from a MS. given him in 1515 by Pico della Mirandola. More may well have seen a MS. of Theophrastus before writing *Richard III*.

²⁸ Cf. J. A. K. Thomson, *Irony* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1927), p. 3 ff.

²⁹ The ironical man "will praise to their faces those whom he attacked behind their

weening *alazon*, of course, but the tragically helpless and simple people of England; yet More continually implies that here is a vice in royalty which must be corrected or replaced by Aristotle's mean of matter-of-factness or sincerity. Since, as Pollard points out,³⁰ there was not historical evidence for Richard's consistent dissimulation, it is possible that More constructed the tyrant's character partly on the basis of these classical descriptions of abnormal behavior. In addition, he could have found portraits in the classical historians of men who disguised their greed for power under a feigned reluctance to accept it. Such is the portrait of Tiberius in Tacitus and Suetonius, or of Pompey in Plutarch.³¹ More was working as an artist and a teacher rather than as a scholar. The result was not necessarily truthful, but it was instructive and effective since everything was organized into an intelligible and moving whole. The historical Richard was a more complicated personality, but this picture of him is consistent, and therefore artistically more satisfying.

Verbal and Socratic irony were the kinds most often discussed by the classical rhetoricians, just as they were in More's age.³² Quintilian's treat-

backs, and will sympathize with them in their defeats." (*Characters*, p. 53.) Cf. More's description of Richard: "He was close and secret, a deep dissimulator, lowly of countenance, arrogant of heart, outwardly compinable where he inwardly hated, not letting to kiss whom he thought to kill. . . ." (*EW*, p. 402).

Richard is unlike Theophrastus' character in that his deception is not always 'motiveless'; he is "dispiteous and cruel, not for evil will always, but ofter for ambition, and either for the surety or increase of his estate" (*EW*, p. 402). He is also sometimes unduly brutal, as in his toying with Hastings before the latter's execution. There he continues to act a part after the deception has become obvious, and he goes out of his way to bring in the strawberries in order to equate them with the value of Hastings' life. (*EW*, pp. 426-427.)

³⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 235.

³¹ See especially the scenes in which they 'bow to the will of the people.' North's Plutarch (London, 1895-96), iv, 238; Philemon Holland's Suetonius (London, 1899), i, 191; and Tacitus, *Annals* xii, v-vii. Cf. *EW*, pp. 445-447. J. B. Bury has remarked that in Tacitus the picture of Tiberius has been "psychologically reconstructed . . . on the assumption that the mainspring of his character is dissimulation; he simply reveals the man in this light, interprets his actions and words in this sense, and uses all the devices of innuendo, of which he was so subtle a master, to bring it out. . . ." —*The Ancient Greek Historians* (New York, 1909), p. 231.

Of interest here, also, is the kind of rhetorical exercise employed by More in his answer to *Tyrannicida* or by Lucian in *Phalaris* I. A. M. Harmon remarks of the latter: "To put yourself in another man's shoes and say what he would have said was a regular exercise of the schools, but to laugh in your sleeve as you said it was not the way of the ordinary rhetorician." (*Lucian*, Loeb Classical Library [London, 1913], i, 1; cf. i, 5-6 and *EW*, p. 440 ff.) More's interest in these matters is well known. Cf. Stapleton, *op. cit.*, p. 116 ff., and W. G. Crane, *Wit and Rhetoric in the Renaissance* (Columbia Univ. Press, 1937), pp. 18-20.

³² Cf. Wynken de Worde (1502): "Yronye of grammar" occurs when "a man sayth one & gyveth to understande the contrarye." (Quoted in *NED*, s.v. "Irony.")

ment is typical. He defines irony³³ as both a trope and a figure of thought in which there is a discrepancy between the language or action and the intended meaning. In the trope the conflict is purely verbal; whereas in the figure, the meaning and sometimes the whole aspect of one's case conflicts with the language or tone of voice adopted. A man's whole life may even be colored with irony as was the case with Socrates, who for the sake of intellectual criticism assumed the rôle of an ignorant man lost in wonder at the wisdom of others.³⁴ Quintilian also observes that irony is closely dependent upon *ethos*, by which he appears to mean a kind of restrained emotion. He does not go on, however, to develop the interesting connection between the emotional force of irony and its artistic reticence, the idea that silences or understatements often speak louder than words.

Verbal and Socratic irony chiefly distinguish the dialogues of Lucian. This More himself observed. It is not without Socratic irony, he stated in his dedicatory epistle to Thomas Ruthall, that Lucian in *Philopseudes* ridicules inordinate love of lying. But Lucian's irony is often tiresomely ineffective either because it is merely verbal dexterity (in which the reader is constantly being asked to reverse what is said), or because the Socratic interrogation leads to cynicism rather than affirmation. More's subject-matter did not permit extended use of Socratic irony and his devoutness safeguarded him from cynicism. Although he delighted in word-play, he used it artistically for serious purposes. Thus, one of the clear ex-

Puttenham in the *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) mentions irony under the heading of figures which are characterized by a "certaine doubleness, whereby our talke is the more guileful & abusing." Irony he calls the "merry skoffe" or the "Drie Mock," and distinguishes it from sarcasm, the "bitter taunt." (Ed. G. D. Wilcock and A. Walker [Cambridge, 1936], III. 18.)

The conventional epithet *dry* points to the relation between the ironical character and the system of bodily humours. Ironical speech or action might be expected from the melancholy man, who was dry and cold, and especially from the choleric man, who was dry and hot. A typical description is Thomas Newton's in *The Touchstone of Complexions* (1565): "... the Cholerike are bitter taunters, dry bobbers nypping gybers, and skornefull mockers of others. . . ." Quoted by Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes* (Cambridge, 1930), p. 59. See W. C. Curry, *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences* (Oxford, 1926), p. 71 ff., for an account of medieval treatises on the subject, which More probably knew, and which illustrate those characters in Chaucer who are "choleric . . . and, therefore, cunning and crafty," as well as proud and cruel.

³³ *Institutio oratoria* VI. 2, 3, 54; IX. 1, 2. The *Institutio* was a textbook in More's household.

³⁴ For other similar classical definitions, see Cicero, *De oratore* II. 66-67; the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, as summarized by A. S. Wilkins in his edition of the *De oratore* (Oxford, 1888), p. 63; and the passages previously cited from Aristotle and the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*. Aristotle adds the suggestion that the ironical man jokes to amuse himself, the buffoon to amuse others.

amples of verbal irony in *Richard III*³⁵ is successful because it is placed in a context of great emotional intensity. Richard attempts to excuse his tyrannical execution of Hastings by accusing him and Jane Shore of treason and immoral relations. Unable to pin the charge of treason on her, Richard

... laid heinously to her charge the thing that herself could not deny, that all the world wist was true, and that nevertheless every man laughed at to hear it then so suddenly so highly taken, that she was nought of her body. And for this cause (as a goodly continent Prince, clean and faultless of himself, sent out of heaven into this vicious world for the amendment of men's manners) he caused the Bishop of London to put her in open penance.³⁶

The intensity results from More's ability to create in his famous description of Shore's wife, which precedes this passage, a living character. The irony of his comment upon her vilifier, that "goodly continent Prince," would have been less bitterly shocking if she had not been portrayed with such vivid sympathy. This sort of thing is largely lacking in Lucian, who works with caricatures and puppets. We admire his skill, but it often remains a game.

Much closer to More's irony than Lucian's is that in the *Ecomium Moriae*. Sometimes, of course, Erasmus, whose irony is many-sided, writes in Lucian's manner. He employs, for example, what may be called irony of exclusion, or exaggerated simplification. He takes a human situation or habit, and emphasizes the element of folly in it to the exclusion of all else. Then he says naively: See, the bases of life are foolish; should not folly be praised? This is cynicism affected for satirical purposes; he professes to believe that all motives and actions are selfish or stupid in order to persuade us that some of them are. This easily becomes mere sophistry in which an argument is over-extended. A fool, for instance, is governed by passion; a wise man by reason. But to deny a man any passion is to unman him. It is then simple enough to describe, as Erasmus does, a cold, colorless, inactive creature and thus 'prove' that we would all prefer the foolish-passionate man.³⁷ And, indeed, in his dedicatory epistle to More, Erasmus professes to be writing only a paradox in which the worse is made to appear the better, after the manner of the classics, including

³⁵ For other examples of verbal irony, see *EW*, pp. 423, 432, 433, 434, 437, 438, 440, 449, 451. More is particularly skilful in making the evil Richard mouth the conventional sayings of virtue. "Ah, whom shall a man trust?" Richard asks when Sir Robert Brackenbury refuses to murder the princes. But this is more properly a part of Richard's dissimulation rather than a comment by the author expressed in the form of verbal irony.

³⁶ *EW*, 431.

³⁷ *The Praise of Folly*, tr. Hoyt H. Hudson (Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 39-40.

Lucian's *The Fly*. But this, too, is ironical; for Erasmus' purpose was, of course, really serious.

The burden of the *Encomium Moriae* appears to be this: In a world of fools, it is folly to be wise. But Erasmus is a realist rather than a cynic. Consequently, his true theme is the arduousness of the devout and rational way of life. He says in effect: I know well enough what the world is like—here is its picture; therefore you may realize that my argument for a life of reason and faith is not merely facile. I am aware of the consequences, but this is my choice. This method is ironical in the sense that Erasmus presents the strongest possible arguments for Folly, and pretends to agree with them; yet he does this not merely to display his dexterity, but in order to establish the context for his own argument, in order, that is, to persuade us that he has chosen maturely after considering all the issues. If bishops, cardinals, popes, and kings had any true wisdom, he observes, they would lead lives of poverty and service. But now "it comes about—by my [Folly's] doing, remember—that scarcely any kind of men live more softly or less oppressed with care. . . ." ³⁸ This is that false-foolish happiness which comes from being content with Appearance and being blind to Reality. When the problem is thus presented in an ironic context, there is no answer. By arguing as Folly, Erasmus says all that can be said for folly, but in such a way that it is obviously not enough. The reader must ultimately judge by the writer's standards. Folly has imperceptibly become apathy, insensibility, the blindness of the Cave—an image that often reappears. But while Erasmus' serious purpose is to rouse us to Reality, he does not underestimate or disguise the cost.

. . . what difference is there between those who in Plato's cave look admiringly at the shadows and simulacra of various things, desiring nothing, quite well satisfied with themselves, as against the wise man who emerges from the cave and sees realities? . . . there either is no difference or, if there is difference, the state of fools is to be preferred. First, their happiness costs least. It costs only a bit of illusion. And second, they enjoy it in the company of so many others. The possession of no good thing is welcome without a companion. And who has not heard of the paucity of wise men—if indeed any is to be found. ³⁹

It will be observed that one of the great virtues of this kind of irony, which might be called the irony of complexity, is its opposition to dogmatism. ⁴⁰ By means of it Erasmus is able to examine in all its difficult

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁰ This kind or use of irony is often encountered (as in Chaucer), but it has not been satisfactorily studied. It is related to the subtler forms of verbal irony. When Chaucer, for example, pretends to agree with the Monk's rationalizing ("I seyde his opinion was good"), he is not only ironically condemning his victim, but he is also acknowledging the difficulty

complications a central human problem: the relation between comfortable conformity and the painful independence of wisdom. We are convinced, consequently, that his choice is neither that of a dreamy idealist nor of a rigid moralist. It is a kind of irony consonant with Erasmus' character and with the common quality of most forms of Renaissance humanism, namely, that attitude towards life which is comprehensive and flexible without being irresponsible.

It is this kind of irony, furthermore, which pervades *Richard III*. Proof and explanation can be nicely begun by examining a crucial passage—the image of the stage play—that appears in Lucian's *Necromantia* (one of the dialogues translated by More in 1506), in the *Encomium Moriae*, and in *Richard III*.

Lucian's *Necromantia* (Loeb translation, iv, 99–101):

So as I [Menippus] looked at them [the dead] it seemed to me that human life is like a long pageant, and that all its trappings are supplied and distributed by Fortune, who arrays the participants in various costumes of many colours. Taking one person, it may be, she attires him royally, placing a tiarra upon his head, giving him body-guards, and encircling his brow with the diadem; but upon another she puts the costume of a slave. Again, she makes up one person so that he is handsome, but causes another to be ugly and ridiculous. I suppose that the show must needs be diversified. And often, in the very middle of the pageant, she exchanges the costumes of several players; instead of allowing them to finish the pageant in the parts that had been assigned to them, she reapparels them,

of deciding how the world shall be served. If the Monk were sincere, his arguments would have some cogency. Cf. William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London, 1935), p. 56: "An irony has no point unless it is true, in some degree, in both senses. . . ." A rather rare example in Lucian is his statement about historical description quoted above.

Its relation to Socratic irony has been suggested by J. H. Robinson, *The Mind in the Making* (New York, 1939), pp. 107–108: "Plato's indecision and urbane fair-mindedness is called irony. Now irony is seriousness without solemnity. It assumes that man is a serio-comic animal, and that no treatment of his affairs can be appropriate which gives him a consistency and dignity which he does not possess. . . . Human thought and conduct can only be treated broadly and truly in a mood of tolerant irony. It belies the logical precision of the long-faced, humorless writer on politics and ethics." Emphasis on the dual nature of man is, of course, a characteristic of More and other humanists. Cf. Douglas Bush, *The Renaissance and English Humanism* (Univ. of Toronto Press, 1939), pp. 54–56.

I. A. Richards and T. S. Eliot and their followers also have some suggestive remarks in this connection. See the summary of their position by Cleanth Brooks in *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1939), pp. 29–37: ". . . nearly all mature attitudes represent some sort of mingling of the approbative and satirical. Frequently the more complex attitudes are expressed, and necessarily expressed, in varying degrees of irony . . . The sentimentalist takes a short cut to intensity by removing all the elements of the experience which might conceivably militate against the intensity. . . . Sincerity as irony, on the other hand, reveals itself as an unwillingness to ignore the complexity of experience."

forcing Croesus to assume the dress of a slave and a captive, and shifting Maeandrius, who formerly paraded among the servants, into the imperial habit of Polycrates. For a brief space she lets them use their costumes, but when the time of the pageant is over, each gives back the properties and lays off the costume along with his body, becoming what he was before birth, no different from his neighbor. Some, however, are so ungrateful that when Fortune appears to them and asks her trappings back, they are vexed and indignant, as if they were being robbed of their own property, instead of giving back what they had borrowed for a little time.

I suppose you have often seen these stage-folk who act in tragedies, and according to the demands of the play become at one moment Creons, and again Priams and Agamemnons; the very one, it may be, who a short time ago assumed with great dignity the part of Cecrops, or of Erectheus soon appears as a servant at the bidding of the poet. And when at length the play comes to an end, each of them strips off his gold-bespangled robe, lays aside his mask, steps out of his buskins, and goes about in poverty and humility. . . . That is what human affairs are like, it seemed to me as I looked.

Encomium Moriae [*Opera Omnia* (Leyden, 1703), iv, cols. 428-429]:

Si quis histrionibus in scena fabulam agentibus personas detrahare conetur, ac spectatoribus veras nativasque facies ostendere, nonne is fabulam omnem perverterit, dignusque habeatur, quem omnes e theatro velut lymphatum saxis eiiciant? Exorietur autem repente nova rerum species, ut qui modo mulier, nunc vir: qui modo iuvenis, mox senex: qui paulo ante Rex, subito Dama: qui modo Deus, repente homunculus appareat. Verum eum errorem tollere, est fabulam omnem perturbare. Illud ipsum figmentum et fucus est, quod spectatorum oculos detinet. Porro mortalium vita omnis quid aliud est, quam fabulam quaequam, in qua alii aliis obiecti personis procedunt, aguntque suas quisque partes, donec choragus educat e proscenio? Qui saepe tamen eundem diverso cultu prodire iubet, ut qui modo Regem purpuratum egerat, nunc servulum pannosum gerat. Adumbrata quidem omnia, sed haec fabula non aliter agitur. Hic si mihi sapiens aliquis coelo delapsus subito exorietur, clamitetque hunc quem omnes ut Deum ac dominum suspiciunt, nec hominum esse, quod pecudum ritu ducatur affectibus, servum esse infimum, quod tam multis, tamque foedis dominis sponte serviat. Rursum alium, quid parentem exstinctum luget, ridere iubeat, quod iam demum ille vivere coeperit, cum alioqui vita haec nihil aliud sit quam mors quaedam. Porro alium stemmatis gloriantem, ignobilem ac nothum appellet, quod a virtute longe absit, quae sola nobilitatis sit fons, adque eundem modum de ceteris omnibus loquatur, quaeso, quid is aliud egerit, nisi ut demens ac furiosus omnibus esse videatur? Ut nihil est stultius praepostera sapientia, ita perversa prudentia nihil imprudentius. Siquidem perverse facit, qui sese non accomodet rebus praesentibus, foroque nolit uti, nec saltem legis illius convivalis meminerit, ἢ πῶς, ἢ ἄπῃ, postuletque ut fabula iam non sit fabula. Contra, vere prudentis est, cum sis mortalis, nihil ultra sortem sapere velle, cumque universa hominum multitudo vel connivere libenter, vel comiter errare. At istud ipsum, inquit,

stultitiae est. Haud equidem inficias iverim, modo fateantur illi vicissim hoc esse, vitae fabulam agere.⁴¹

Richard III (EW, pp. 447–448):

And in a stage play all the people know right well that he that playeth the Sultan is perhaps a souter. Yet if one should can so little good, to show out of season what acquaintance he hath with him, and call him by his own name while he standeth in his majesty, one of his tormentors might hap to break his head, and worthy, for marring of the play. And so they said that these matters [Richard's machinations] be King's games, as it were stage plays, and for the most part played upon scaffolds. In which poor men be but the lookers-on. And they that wise be will meddle no farther. For they that sometime step up and play with them, when they cannot play their parts, they disorder the play and do themselves no good.⁴²

⁴¹ Tr. Hudson, pp. 37–38: If a person were to try stripping the disguises from actors while they play a scene upon the stage, showing to the audience their real looks and the faces they were born with, would not such a one spoil the whole play? And would not the spectators think he deserved to be driven out of the theater with brickbats, as a drunken disturber? For at once a new order of things would be apparent. The actor who played a woman would now be seen a man; he who a moment ago appeared young, is old; he who but now was a king, is suddenly an hostler; and he who played the god is a sorry little scrub. Destroy the illusion and any play is ruined. It is the paint and trappings that take the eyes of spectators. Now what else is the whole life of mortals but a sort of comedy, in which the various actors, disguised by various costumes and masks, walk on and play each one his part, until the manager waves them off the stage? Moreover, this manager frequently bids the same actor go back in a different costume, so that he who has but lately played the king in scarlet now acts the flunkey in patched clothes. Thus all things are presented by shadows; yet this play is put on in no other way.

But suppose, right here, some wise man who has dropped down from the sky should suddenly confront me and cry out that the person whom the world has accepted as a god and a master is not even a man, because he is driven sheeplike by his passions; that he is the lowest slave, because he willingly serves so many and such base masters. Or again, suppose the visitor should command some one mourning his father's death to laugh, because now his father has really begun to live—for in a sense our earthly life is but a kind of death. Suppose him to address another who is glorying in his ancestry, and to call him low and base-born because he is so far from virtue, the only true fount of nobility. Suppose him to speak of others in like vein. I ask you, what would he get by it, except to be considered by everyone as insane and raving? As nothing is more foolish than wisdom out of place, so nothing is more imprudent than unseasonable prudence. And he is unseasonable who does not accommodate himself to things as they are, who is "unwilling to follow the market," who does not keep in mind at least that rule of conviviality, "Either drink or get out"; who demands, in short, that the play should no longer be a play. The part of a truly prudent man, on the contrary, is (since we are mortal) not to aspire to wisdom beyond his station, and either, along with the rest of the crowd, pretend not to notice anything, or affably and companionably be deceived. But that, they tell us, is folly. Indeed, I shall not deny it; only let them, on their side, allow that it is also to play out the comedy of life."

⁴² Louvain, 1565: "Jam eum qui Imperatoris personam agit in tragoedia, populus non ignorat forsitan esse cerdonem. Tamen tantae inscitiae est illic scire quae scias, ut si quis eum vocet qui vere est, non qui falso fingitur, veniat in periculum, ne ab personatis satellitibus malo joco bene vapulet et id quidem merito totam fabulam sit aggressus intempestiva veritate turbare."

It is clear, as the editors of *Richard III* point out,⁴³ that More took the *tormentors* and *satellites* from the *Necromantia*, and that he therefore had Lucian's image in mind. But it is equally clear—and More's editors do not suggest this—that his application of the image is like Erasmus' rather than Lucian's. The latter implies that when life is viewed with detachment, human beings are revealed as the playthings of Fortune or Chance. We can do little more than laugh cynically at the spectacle, or at best attempt to safeguard ourselves by leading simple lives which change will but slightly disorder. In the *Encomium*, however, this image, like that of the Cave, is of central importance to the main theme and its ironical treatment. Erasmus is illustrating the complexity and difficulty of behaving as an intelligent non-conformist. He is not saying that it is impossible to act in a rational manner, that we are helpless in Fortune's grip; on the contrary, he is pointing out the arduousness as well as the worthiness of the life of reason. More, because he was writing a political history, applies the image to the narrower problem of political non-conformity, but his basic intention is the same as Erasmus.' He seems to say that matter-of-factness and honesty can have no place in state-craft, that all must be done by formal hocus-pocus, and that it is dangerously futile or forward for ignorant, sincere men to meddle in affairs which most nearly concern their hearts' ease. It is a game played on *scaffolds*, and the serious pun gives the key to the tone of the whole passage. This is clearly not cynicism but rather what we have called the irony of complexity. By means of it More avoids dogmatism and unrealistic simplification; he acknowledges the difficulties of living under a tyranny at the same time that he urges his readers to act like rational men and oppose it.

Furthermore, by using irony, More follows Lucian's recommendation that the historian's generalizations, his lessons of "widsom and wariness" in Ascham's words, should be conveyed subtly. In view of his subject-matter, it is not surprising that most of More's ironical comments or generalizations are concerned with the characters of ruler and ruled and with their proper relationship. Although More does not depart from aristocratic and classical tradition to the extent of championing the masses, their simplicity by being continually contrasted with the hypocrisy of the rulers becomes something of a virtue. This is reminiscent of the last section of the *Encomium*, where Erasmus, parodying the scholastic method, 'proves' that in the Bible and the Fathers folly is recommended above knowledge. Here folly like More's simplicity, has acquired the child-like or Christ-like quality of sincerity and faith as opposed to that knowledge which is the shrewdness of dissimulation.⁴⁴ One

⁴³ *EW*, p. 210.

⁴⁴ Tr. Hudson, p. 118. Erasmus concludes: "The Christian religion on the whole seems to have a kinship with some sort of folly, while it has no alliance whatever with wisdom."²

recalls More's engaging story of Edward sending venison to the citizens of London; so "that no one thing, in many days before, got him either more hearts or more hearty favour among the common people, which oftentimes more esteem and take for greater kindness a little courtesy than a great benefit."⁴⁵ Their childishness is granted, but people who possess only a naïve heart are not to be entirely scorned in comparison with rulers who possess only a sophisticated mind.

Kings are cruel and deceptive. More appears to say, at first reading, that this is inevitable. Edward, for example, ". . . was of youth greatly given to fleshly wantonness, from which health of body in great prosperity and fortune, without a special grace, hardly refraineth." He and his two brothers ". . . as they were great states of birth, so were they great and stately of stomach, greedy and ambitious of authority, and impatient of partners." And Richard was ". . . such as is in states called warlike, in other men otherwise."⁴⁶ Thus More acknowledges the truth of the commonplace that great power involves great temptations, and that we should remember this in our judgment of kings. At the same time he reminds us ironically that kings, too, are men with the power to be virtuous if they choose. By admitting the difficulties of their position, he strengthens his condemnation. This is evident in Richard's speech of acceptance at the climax of his dissimulation. For an honorable man, says Richard with mock piety, the crown is more labor and pain than pleasure; and a dishonorable man is not worthy to have it.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *EW*, p. 400.

⁴⁶ *EW*, pp. 400, 402.—Innuendo of a similar kind is to be found in Tacitus. When Italicus was sent as king to the Cerusci, his "admirers flocked around a prince who practised occasionally the inoffensive foibles of courtesy and restraint, but more frequently the drunkenness and incontinence dear to barbarians." (*Annals* xi. xvi, Loeb translation.) Nero's affair with Acte was countenanced because "there was always the risk that, if he were checked in this passion, his instincts would break out at the expense of women of rank." (*Ibid.* xiii. xii.) Compare Edward's "wantonness," which "fault not greatly grieved the people, for neither could any one man's pleasure stretch and extend to the displeasure of very many. . . ." (*EW*, p. 400.)

⁴⁷ *EW*, p. 446. Cf. Erasmus' treatment of the same problem. "I say that if the prince weighed these things [royal hardships], and many more like them, within himself—and he would do so were he wise—I am afraid he could neither sleep nor eat in any joy. But as it is, with my assistance, kings leave all these concerns to the gods, [and] take care of themselves nicely. . . ." (Tr. Hudson, p. 94.)

The subtlety of More's approach is emphasized by comparison with that of Commynes, a chronicler of great native shrewdness, but of little learning or literary sophistication. In his *Mémoires*, published about ten years after the completion of *Richard III*, he decides that for each nation God has set up another in opposition to it in order to keep both within the bounds of fear and humility. God is forced to make this arrangement because only He is powerful enough to chastise princes, and because without this check, princes, who are even more wicked than ordinary men, would be unbearable. (Ed. Joseph Calmette [Paris, 1924], II, xviii–xx.)

Indeed, by translating More's ironic characterization of Richard, we are able to picture many lineaments of his ideal of royalty. Practically every utterance of Richard's is hypocritical. More has given us information which forces us to penetrate the disguise. We participate in the act of literary creation by constantly interpreting all that Richard says, and our enjoyment is consequently heightened at the same time that we are instructed.⁴⁸ We note the sharp contrast between Richard's pretended humanity in desiring playfellows for the young king and his real purpose, which is to get the princes into his power. When he abhors the queen's effort to cause dissension, we know that it is dissension which he has labored for. His request for "some honourable trusty man" to persuade the queen to release the princes, must be translated as some man who has an honorable reputation but who can be coerced into acting hypocritically for the occasion.⁴⁹ Even the discussion of sanctuary which follows is ultimately molded to More's method and purpose. Its length, which may seem to be inartistic and which may be partly the result of current controversy,⁵⁰ is offset by the ending. "Knoweth any man any place," concludes Buckingham, "wherein it is lawful one man to do another wrong?"⁵¹ And the ironical answer is the opposite of the negative one expected. Yes, at Richard's court, where there is no law but his will. In short, from this and other ironical evidence we obtain a picture of an ideal king who rules in accordance with the laws of God and man, and who safeguards the interests of simple men of good will.

It will be observed that by consistently portraying Richard as a dissimulator More not only subtly conveys his lessons of social morality but also unifies his narrative. The achievement of unity was an important task of the historian who wished to surpass the annals of the Middle Ages. A Christian world chronicler had, in a sense, no problem; his plan, perfectly integrated and complete, was supplied by the orthodox picture of human life extending from the Creation to the return of Christ. Many simple monastic or civic annalists attempted to acquire prestige and a sort of abortive unity for their brief notations by enclosing them in bald summaries of the beginning and end of things. This was impossible for a sophisticated writer like More; nor could he conscientiously undertake a world history. The practice of the classics and the higher standards of historical scholarship in his day prevented him. Humanistic theorists who faced this problem suggested, as we have seen, that unity should be gained by a more complete and accurate explanation of causes. Now,

⁴⁸ The subject of the reader's participation in ironic writing is well developed by David Worcester, *The Art of Satire* (Harvard University Press, 1940), pp. 31-32.

⁴⁹ *EW*, pp. 412-413.

⁵⁰ Cf. N. M. Trenholme, "The Right of Sanctuary in England," *Univ. of Missouri Studies*, 1, 5 (1903), *passim*.

⁵¹ *EW*, p. 416.

when cause meant only personal motive, this advice amounted to suggesting that some leading figure should be consistently characterized so as to integrate all of the action while he prevailed. This is obviously More's method. He makes everything hinge on the character of Richard.

Furthermore, since Richard is a tyrant who falls from high degree, we have here the pattern of medieval tragedy. The *de casibus* example can be very dull and undramatic, as Chaucer demonstrated in the Monk's Tale, which More had probably read.⁵² It is suggestive to think of *Richard III* as an intermediate stage in the history of the use of the biographical or historical example. That history is a part of the movement from allegory to realism. We find William of Malmesbury, one of the best of the medieval chroniclers, saying typically: "I shall relate such anecdotes of him [William the Conqueror], as may be a matter of incitement to the indolent, or of example to the enterprising; useful to the present age, and pleasing to posterity. But I shall spend little time in relating such things as are of service to no one, and which produce disgust in the reader, as well as ill-will to the author."⁵³ In 1521, John Major, an acquaintance of More's circle, believed it to be his duty to write history in such a way that James V might "learn not only the thing that was done, but also how it ought to have been done. . . ."⁵⁴ He tells us, for instance, that William Rufus destroyed religious houses so that he might have more room for his favorite sport, hunting; but while hunting he was killed. Where "a man sins there too shall come the penalty of sin. Of the holy place he made a profane pleasance; but a great and public sin must needs be followed by a condign punishment."⁵⁵ Likewise, Lydgate's method in his *Fall of Princes*, as Professor Farnham has remarked, was "that of the impatient moralist ardently desiring, and finding, retribution for sinners here and now. . . ." His "crude moral didacticism, using examples of tragic justice for its transparent ends, could of itself never have produced great tragedy . . ." since he assumes "that we may see all the meaning of adversity immediately and schematically." Therefore, he "is almost incapable of a view of tragedy which gives suffering some trace-

⁵² If not Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*.

⁵³ *De gestis regum Anglorum; Historiae novellae*, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series (London, 1887-1889), II, 283-284. The translation is by J. A. Giles, *The Chronicles of the Kings of England* (London, 1847).

⁵⁴ *A History of Greater Britain* (1521), tr. and ed. by Archibald Constable, Scottish Hist. Soc., first series, x (Edinburgh, 1892), p. cxxxv.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130. Major is often more realistic and detailed than in this passage, where he is following medieval models, but it is significant that neither he nor Polydore Vergil felt it necessary to exclude such artificial examples. In this respect they are less advanced than More.

able cause in human character without making the cause a simple sin easily classified."⁵⁶

Far removed from this is Bacon's request that historians follow Machiavelli and "write what men do and not what men ought to do."⁵⁷ We have enough examples of ideal conduct, he says sharply, but no satisfactory treatment of the psychological sources of our conduct which might guide us in approaching the ideal. Many writers have "made good and fair exemplars . . . of Good, Virtue, Duty, Felicity; . . . but how to attain these excellent marks, and how to frame and subdue the will of man to become true and conformable to these pursuits, they pass it over altogether or slightly and unprofitably. . . . The reason of this omission I suppose to be . . . that men have despised to be conversant in ordinary and common matters."⁵⁸ Their attention, in short, has been focused too closely on final causes. Just so, the medieval chronicler or poet was unprofitably concerned with only the didactic catastrophe of his *de casibus* example. All was adjusted, foreshortened, or falsified to enforce the moral conclusion. Little or no regard was paid to those "ordinary and common matters," the psychological changes in character through which the good or evil person passed to his doom.⁵⁹ In short, one may trace in history-writing, as does Professor Farnham in tragedy, the change from the use of the crudely artificial didactic example towards a more realistic interpretation of life.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Univ. of California Press, 1936), pp. 162-163, 168. ⁵⁷ *Advancement of Learning, Works*, vi, 327.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, vi, 309-310. For a fuller treatment of Bacon's discussion and use of the exemplary method, see the writer's article, "Sir Francis Bacon's Theory of Civil History-Writing," *ELH*, viii (1941), 161-183.

⁵⁹ This distinction between medieval chronicle or theatrical humanist history and a narrative like More's resembles that between melodrama and tragedy. A melodrama administers shocks by piling up horrors which are insufficiently motivated because they are dependent upon coincidence or acts of God. In a tragedy "the excess of tragic feeling is removed from the actual catastrophe and transferred to apparently insignificant events." This is done by exposition of causes and dramatic irony. (Cf. David Worcester, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.) Just so, in the chronicles, saints, devils, miracles, sudden conversions, and rivers red with blood, like sinister mustachios and the arrival of the marines, supply the deficiencies of the author. Cf. Eleanor P. Hammond, *English Verse between Chaucer and Surrey* (Duke Univ. Press, 1927), p. 28: "the notion of bringing the figure closer to the eye . . . is outside the comprehension of most medieval narrators. Was a narrative to be more impressive or more heroic, it had more tortures and more combats added to it." More's account is better narrative, if not more truthful history, because, as in tragedy, causation and dramatic irony are stressed.

⁶⁰ Much of the material used as evidence by Farnham was familiar to More—Boccaccio, Chaucer, and the moralities, especially those produced by Henry Medwall at Morton's. Cf. Farnham, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-97, 201-221; R. W. Chambers, *Thomas More*, pp. 61-62; and

We have remarked that *Richard III* may be thought of as an intermediate stage in this process of change. More does not present the realistic and relatively amoral picture of political life that Bacon calls for. Although his method is unusually subtle, he is still in a sense teaching what men ought to do rather than what is simply expedient. He sometimes worked deductively and he carefully points the moral of Richard's fall. But he does attempt with some success to transfer the interest of the reader from Richard's catastrophe to the steps by which he reaches it. This is accomplished in part, as we have seen, by the fullness and consistency with which More characterizes Richard and describes the details of his dissimulation. Of equal importance is More's use of dramatic irony. This kind of irony is, of course, implicit in the *de casibus* example. As Christians who believe in the doctrine of *contemptus mundi* or as pagans who perceive the unpredictability of Fate, we recognize the irony of a person striving for a reward which is evil in itself or which may be snatched away from him. A writer may take advantage of this situation by underlining the latent irony. Every act of the ambitious person thus becomes fraught with ominous significance. Bacon's "ordinary and common matters" are charged with importance for the informed spectator, whose attention has been transferred from the conclusion to the process in the sense that he is led to foresee the conclusion in every stage of that process.⁶¹

Thus, at the very beginning of his narrative, More introduces the characters and tells us what the outcome is to be. Edward, in his dying speech, foresees that greed for power will be the cause of tragedy. We

A. W. Reed, *Early Tudor Drama* (London, 1926), p. 154, where we are told that in 1538 More was left "Chauseer of Talles and Boocas" by Walter Smyth, who had been his servant from 1520 to 1529.

⁶¹ It is perhaps pertinent to recall that this is also the method of Thucydides, since his history was studied in More's circle. Thucydides, like More, was writing a history and not a drama, but beneath the multiplicity of skirmishes runs the ironic undertone: the tragic ruin of a people whose democratic ideals were perverted by the brutality of war. Pericles' funeral oration is the expression of those ideals. Thereafter, Thucydides is careful to point the irony. Hard upon the oration comes the statement that "on neither side were there any mean thoughts . . . ; they had never seen war, and were therefore very willing to take up arms." [Tr. B. Jowett (Oxford, 1900), I, 107.] At the death of Pericles we are given a preview of the inevitable disaster when the people shall have departed from his counsel. (I, 148). For "war, which takes away the comfortable provision of life, is a hard master and tends to assimilate men's characters to their conditions." (I, 242) How the character of the Athenians has been corrupted is shown us in the cynical dialogue with the Melians before the wanton destruction of Melos. This kind of preparation so heightens the tragedy in Sicily that one is inclined, like Professor Thomson, to read more irony than was perhaps intended into the quiet conclusion: "Thus ended the Sicilian expedition." (Cf. J. A. K. Thomson, *Irony*, pp. 139-162.) More guides the reader in a similar manner.

are explicitly informed of Richard's hypocrisy and of the forthcoming murder of the young princes, and the ultimate fall of the tyrant is clearly implied. There is constantly in our minds the thought of More's comment on the famous scene of Hastings riding to his execution, "never merrier nor never so full of good hope in his life." "But I shall rather let anything pass me than the vain surety of man's mind so near his death."⁶²

The Latin versions break off directly after Richard's coronation, when he is at the height of his prosperity; but the English continues, and with it the dramatic irony. Richard's fall, which before had been implied, is now declared. "Now fell there mischiefs thick. And as the thing evil got is never well kept, through all the time of his reign never ceased there cruel death and slaughter, till his own destruction ended it."⁶³ After relating the murder of the princes and moralizing upon it in a less subtle fashion than usual, More briefly describes the fate of the murderers and their master, "King Richard himself, as ye shall hereafter hear" in detail.⁶⁴ Thus we begin to read the unfinished account of the conspiracy between Buckingham and Morton in the light of its conclusion. And thus, too, we see More to the very end writing history as a Christian humanist, using intelligently the methods of ancient rhetoric in order to make persuasive his conception of the life of faith and reason in a world complicated by the presence of evil and irrationality. It was natural that he should turn next to the composition of the *Utopia*.

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⁶² *EW*, p. 428.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

